

Customer Service

Recommendation 2B: Make better use of video/teleconferencing to reduce physical presence at court mandated hearings."

AUDIO CONFERENCING

Chief Justice Broderick directed the trial court administrative judges to explore the use and benefits of audio conferencing in each trial court jurisdiction. The New Hampshire Judicial Branch selected a private vendor, "CourtCall," to facilitate this project, which allows the court to hold pre-trial conference calls with lawyers instead of requiring a court appearance, improving court efficiency and reducing travel time for lawyers and client costs.

New Hampshire Probate Courts have taken the lead in use of audio conferencing. Installation of hardware and telecommunications lines began in late 2006 and a formal Administrative Order was issued to regulate audio conferencing on December 31, 2006. Equipment has been installed in all ten probate courts and most are using audio conferencing with good results. Probate Court Administrative Judge David King is reviewing the first six months of experience in the probate court and is expected to soon issue a revised Administrative Order to standardize and promote audio conferencing in the probate courts.

Judge Edwin W. Kelly, Administrative Judge of the District Court and Family Division, has directed that audio conferencing be used first in the district courts and family division sites located in Salem and in Plymouth. He has designated Salem District Court Judge John Korbey to oversee this project. After a reasonable period of use in Salem and Plymouth, Judge Kelly will evaluate the effectiveness of audio conferencing in the district courts and in the family division and decide how to expand this service throughout the district courts and the family division.

The Superior Court has been using audio conferencing for case structuring conferences in Grafton Superior Court for about ten years. Recently, state of the art equipment has been installed in Grafton Superior Court and formal audio conferencing protocols were developed. Effective June 8, 2007, active promotion of audio-conferencing began at the Grafton site.

Audio-conferencing through "CourtCall" is now planned for installation in four additional superior court sites.

VIDEO CONFERENCING

Beginning in 1997, through federal grants, court officials installed video teleconferencing equipment in seven superior courts, three district courts, four

houses of correction, three New Hampshire State Prison sites, two police departments, and one public defender office.

There is continued interest in video conferencing which reduces costs and improves security by eliminating the need to transport prisoners to the courthouse. Court officials are partnering with county and state officials to make maximum use of funds from multiple sources

Strafford County purchased and installed video teleconferencing equipment in the Strafford House of Corrections, district courts in Rochester and Dover, and Strafford Superior Court in 2006. County officials estimate that this equipment saves \$270,000 per year in prisoner transport costs alone.

Rockingham County installed video teleconferencing equipment in Salem District Court and in the Rockingham County House of Corrections in 2005. Plans are underway to install similar equipment in the Portsmouth District Court.

State Police Forensics Lab:

RSA 516:37 permits prosecutors to ask that trial court judges accept testimony from forensics laboratory technicians by video. We are working with Forensics Lab officials to permit technicians to testify in court from a remote location, pursuant to RSA 516:37. With grant funds, we expect the Department of Safety to install video equipment at the Forensics Lab and at the district courts in Derry and Plymouth. Using judicial branch equipment funds, we expect to install video equipment in Franklin District Court. When forensics lab technicians are able to testify by video from the lab, they will eliminate significant travel time and reallocate their time to address a significant backlog in drug analysis requests.

Involuntary Emergency Admissions:

Pursuant to RSA 135-C:31, a district court judge conducts Involuntary Emergency Admission hearings at the New Hampshire Hospital. If medical experts from remote locations are allowed to testify by video, they can save significant time and money related to travel. We are working with the office of Behavioral Health in the Department of Health and Human Services in support of a plan to install video in community mental health centers, the New Hampshire Hospital, and Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital for exactly this purpose.